

network

HUMANITIES

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Less than a year ago, CCH embarked on California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, our unprecedented statewide reading and story-sharing program conducted in partnership with the California Center for the Book and the California State Library.

THOUSANDS OF CALIFORNIANS TURN OUT FOR READING "THE GRAPES OF WRATH" HUNDREDS OF EVENTS TAKE PLACE ACROSS THE STATE

When we first explored the idea of Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, we thought that Steinbeck's story of the Joad's journey from the Dust Bowl to California would be particularly relevant to Californians, nearly 50 percent of whom come from someplace else. We had no idea, however, what an enormous success the program would be.

Thousands of Californians responded to CCH's invitation to read John Steinbeck's novel and share stories of their California experiences. People packed high-profile lectures, performances, art exhibits, films and discussion groups. Almost 200 libraries as well as a host of other community organizations held events.

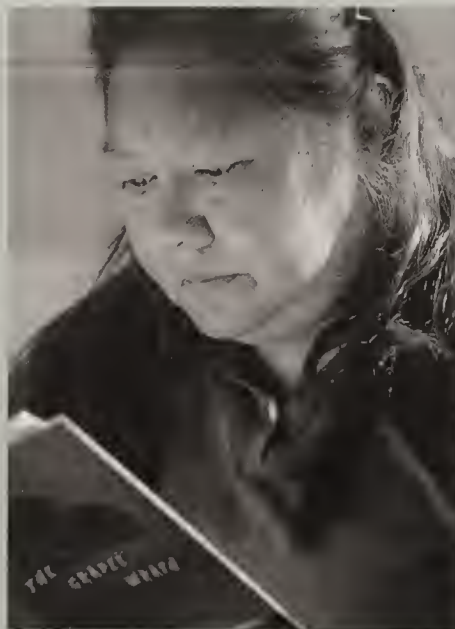
"Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* exceeded all our expectations and reinforced our belief in the impor-

tance of stories in strengthening communities," said CCH Executive Director Jim Quay. "People not only read Steinbeck's book, they also came together to share stories and discuss issues with their neighbors. We were extremely pleased with the outcome because we believe that these kinds of programs truly make a difference in community life. We were also pleased with the tremendous job done by public libraries in California, as well as the work conducted by all our other partners. It was a magnificent effort."

The scope of the effort was remarkable. The CCH website, which served as the main repository of information for the program, listed almost 1,000 separate events. These included such special programs as a teen essay contest

sponsored by the San Rafael Public Library, a 24-hour readathon at a Fresno Krispy Kreme sponsored by the Fresno County Library, and a conversation with writer T.C. Boyle sponsored by the San Diego Public Library.

Many libraries held more than a dozen events. The Sacramento Public Library sponsored 18 programs, one of the largest in its history. Included was a talk by award-winning author, PBS NewsHour commentator and Sacramento native Richard Rodriguez that drew



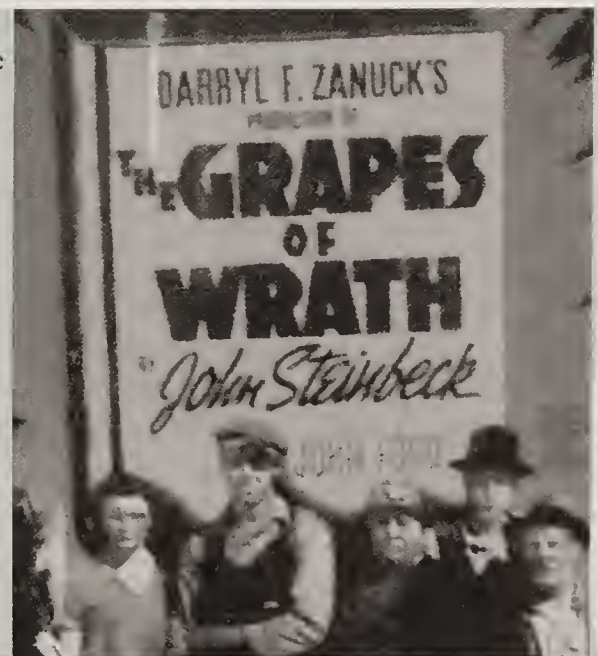
A participant in the Grapes of Wrath readathon at a Fresno Krispy Kreme. Photo/Tommy Monreal

300 people, a presentation by Jan Goggins, an expert on the photography of Dorothea Lange, and an evening with David Masumoto, a writer and farmer (and former CCH board chair), who operates a raisin farm in Del Rey, Calif.

The San Diego and Contra Costa Libraries also held an astonishing array of events. San Diego had more than 30 programs, which, in addition to the T.C. Boyle event, included a *Grapes of Wrath* book discussion in Vietnamese. And the Contra Costa Libraries sponsored 37 events, including a teen poetry slam.

The sheer variety of the

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500 People attend "Grapes of Wrath" screening in Hanford Film shown in restored movie theater

When Hanford Librarian Steve Fjeldsted booked the historic Fox Theater for the library's main *Grapes of Wrath* event, he knew his biggest challenge would be filling the seats. "It was the one thing I was worried about," Fjeldsted said.

But when Fjeldsted emerged from behind the curtain of the theater to introduce the eclectic program that October night, an audience of more than 500 greeted him. On the bill was music by local singer/songwriter, Pat "the Hat," a showing of the John Ford film *The Grapes of Wrath*, an introduction to the film by Michael Tate of California State University, Fresno, a talk and slide

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CALIFORNIA STORIES: READING “THE GRAPES OF WRATH” GREAT MOMENTS FOR STEINBECK AND CALIFORNIANS

By James Quay
Executive Director

As I write this, the October and November events of California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* are underway, and they are generating more energy and excitement than we could have anticipated just nine months ago.

Our public library partners are holding almost 1,000 discussions and special events. The Sacramento Public Library alone has scheduled 18 separate events, and they are by no means the exception. In San Francisco, people filled the main auditorium of the Main Library to hear excerpts of the novel read aloud. All copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* there have been checked out for weeks.

In addition, we’ve received anecdotal reports of bookstores’ and YMCAs’ holding special events, and families’ and private book groups’ reading the book together. A travel bookstore in Berkeley hosted a forum on *The Grapes of Wrath*. The California State Assembly passed a resolution supporting the project. Members of Congress stood up to read passages into the official record. In Fresno, readers gathered at a Krispy Kreme and read Steinbeck’s classic from beginning to end. An hour-long call-in public radio program received testimonial after testimonial from Steinbeck readers.

CCH has been planning this first phase of our California Stories initiative for over a year now, and we’re gratified to see it embraced by so many organizations and individual Californians. Now we begin to see our abstract plans and grant proposals turn into meaningful and memorable moments.

I was privileged to be one of the readers at the San Francisco Public Library event and heard Ronnie Gilbert, a member of the legendary folk

group The Weavers, mount the stage and tell the reader who preceded her, “You broke my heart with that passage.” The passage she was referring to read: “The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot.”

Then Gilbert proceeded to break our hearts with her reading of chapter 26—Ma Joad in the company store. Is *The Grapes of Wrath* still a powerful book? No one in that auditorium had any doubt.

In his remarks in Sacramento, Richard Rodriguez identified two major veins of California stories: the stories of immigrants, which tend to be stories of hardships overcome and dreams sought, and the stories of the California born, which are often stories of loss and disappointment. He pointed to John Steinbeck as the example of a California native who had imagined and articulated the story of the immigrant. As I listened with that Sacramento audience, I wanted to think that a great conversation was beginning, a conversation between regions of the state, between native-born Californians and first-generation immigrants, between ethnic communities of all kinds.

Clearly, this project has struck a chord with Californians in almost every corner of the state. But by the time you read this, Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* will have come to an end. The question you may be wondering about is, what’s next? How can we top this program?

In the next phase of California Stories, CCH will offer grants to organizations to enable them to gather Californians together to tell and share stories. Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* has confirmed that Californians are ready and eager to talk to one another. They simply need the right occasions, and we intend to supply them with just that.



Thousands of Californians (continued from page 1)

programs characterized the statewide project as much as their quantity. In Chico, for example, some 80 people wrote their family stories in connection with the program, and many people in Chico showed up at a local mall to read Steinbeck aloud as part of a literacy readathon.

Many groups contribute to effort

In addition to libraries, Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* involved a number of other organizations and institutions, including colleges and universities, labor groups, schools, and cultural and civic organizations.

Among the cultural groups supporting the program was L.A. Theatre Works in Los Angeles, which organized and produced a weeklong run of the Tony Award-winning play *The Grapes of Wrath*. And Stanford University’s Continuing Studies Department participated in the program by sponsoring an evening with Sebastiao Salgado, the world-renowned photographer who has spent 30 years documenting the dignity and suffering of humanity.

Penguin Books became an early program sponsor, underwriting and distributing displays, posters and bookmarks to California bookstores. Penguin also issued the first Spanish-language edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* to provide greater access to the program for California’s growing Latino population.

A number of prominent individuals and organizations supported the program. They included California’s two U.S. senators and 24 Congressional representatives, California Governor Gray Davis and First Lady Sharon Davis, 25 mayors of California cities and numerous city officials, and well-known members of the arts and entertainment community, including Arthur Miller, Rob Reiner, Maria Shriver, Dennis Hopper and Jackson Browne.

To help ensure broad participation in the program, CCH and its partners developed a number of materials for libraries. These included a four-color poster, graphic materials that could be downloaded from the Council’s website, and a *Grapes of Wrath* discussion guide.

More California stories to come

Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* has provided a myriad of opportunities for Californians to both read Steinbeck’s novel and share stories of their California experiences. Our next phase of California Stories will provide a number of other opportunities for the telling and sharing of stories. Future efforts include Communities Speak, 10 projects that use story-based cultural activities to bring people together to address community issues, the California Documentary Project, six projects that bring people together around film, video and photography, and the California Story Fund, story-based projects that uncover compelling new stories from California’s diverse communities. With these projects and others yet to come, the Council will continue its groundbreaking work of using cultural programs to inspire changes within communities. Stay tuned.

CCH new staff member

CCH is pleased to announce that Christine Kennedy has joined the San Francisco office as an administrative assistant and executive assistant to Executive Director Jim Quay. Kennedy recently moved to San Francisco from San Diego, where she was an administrative assistant at HMC Architects and Electronic Productions Distribution. Before that, she lived in Seattle, working as a front office administrator for CVS.com. Kennedy’s first love is film and video, and she eventually plans to attend graduate school in that field. She has already worked on more than 20 film and video projects, serving in a number of different capacities, including director, producer and actor. She holds a B.A. in communications from Evergreen State College.



FILMMAKER SCREENS DOCUMENTARY ABOUT MIGRANT WORKER CAMPS

Film provokes discussion about treatment of immigrants

As part of *Reading The Grapes of Wrath*, award-winning filmmaker and producer Paul Espinosa screened his documentary *Uneasy Neighbors* at half a dozen libraries in Southern California and one high school, Santa Ana High School, in Orange County. The film chronicles the escalating tensions in San Diego between people living in migrant worker camps and nearby affluent suburbanites.

At Santa Ana High School, Espinosa showed the film to a group of honor students, many of whom were newly arrived Latino immigrants. "We had a stimulating discussion about the film and the issue of how newcomers are treated," Espinosa said.

"These kids are aware of the

El Salvadoran Gloria Solis, five months pregnant, peers warily out of her makeshift home in one of the migrant camps in north San Diego County featured in Uneasy Neighbors. Photo/Don Bartlett

stereotypes out there. They know about the accusations that Latinos come here to get on welfare. They're also aware of the determination their families have to make a better life for themselves. To some extent when they see *Uneasy Neighbors*, they see their own lives on the screen. And they recognize that the affluent people in the film concerned about property values and sanitation have counterparts in Santa Ana and other places where people are unhappy about the presence of migrant workers in their midst."

Everywhere that Espinosa showed the film, it provoked discussion. "Some people were surprised to find out that migrants were living the way they were and wanted to know if it was still going on. People also raised deeper questions about the kind of community we want to live in and our responsibility to do something about the gap between the haves and the have nots," he said.

For Espinosa, it was gratifying that the film, which he made more than 10 years ago, still resonates with truth for so many people. "I was aware at the time that the film was timeless. It's a small story about a particular situation, but the dynamics driving it are still alive in many parts of California today."

500 people attend screening (continued from page 1)

show by Susan Shillinglaw, director of the Center for Steinbeck Studies, and a guest appearance by Dust Bowl poet Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel. Dolores Gallegos of the Hanford City Council served as the Spanish language interpreter.

It was particularly sweet to be showing the 1940 John Ford film, said Fjeldsted. The movie had never been shown in Hanford before nor in any other valley town. "At the time, it was considered too hot to handle," he said.

It was also a bonus to show the film at the Fox Theater. The beautifully restored theater, which now exclusively presents country music artists, has the biggest screen in the valley, but it doesn't show movies anymore.

The evening began with Pat, "the Hat" leading the audience in a sing-along and ended with a discussion of the film more than three hours later. In between the audience saw historical slides of Kings County, including one of the 1938 floods when migrants were starving, heard about incidents in John Steinbeck's life, including the time he lost a manuscript and re-created

the work almost verbatim, and watched the 1940 classic Henry Fonda film.

Writing about the evening in the *Hanford Sentinel*, Stacy Broussard said: "... it was a mixed crowd, ranging from the very young to the very old. While a few youngsters

It was particularly sweet to be showing the 1940 John Ford film, said Fjeldsted. The movie had never been shown in Hanford before nor in any other Valley town. "At the time, it was considered too hot to handle," he said.

nodded off toward the end ... many were bright-eyed and caught up with their elders in the contrast of life in John Steinbeck's time of Dust Bowl Depression and the valley as they know and live it today."

The 60 or so people who stayed for the discussion following the film had lots of questions and comments. One man told the gathering that his grandfather had been in the migrant camp where John Ford had filmed scenes for the movie and that his grandfather had stood within 50 feet of Henry Fonda. Another participant said that her grandparents had testified for Steinbeck in a defamation suit brought against him by the State of California. The suit claimed that Steinbeck had exaggerated the conditions in the camps.

Before the event, Fjeldsted had received several letters from people objecting to the library's sponsoring a free discussion of the Steinbeck book and the film, claiming that the Okie migration was a myth.

"That Friday evening," said Fjeldsted, "we had people who had been in the migrant camps and children and grandchildren of migrants and many people who had lived through the times or knew someone who had. It completely shot holes in the idea that this part of our history didn't happen."

But the event was more than just a way for people to reconnect with their past. "The themes touched on by *The Grapes of Wrath* are extremely relevant here today," said Fjeldsted. "The valley is still a magnet for working-class people who are priced out of other areas in California and come here to raise a family. Many are Mexican-American families familiar with hardships. They immediately make the connection between the living conditions that Steinbeck portrays and their own lives."

The Hanford Library is part of the King's County library system in the San Joaquin Valley. Steinbeck visited the migrant tent camps in Kings County three years before he wrote The Grapes of Wrath. Many of Steinbeck's experiences during that time found their way into the letter and spirit of the novel.



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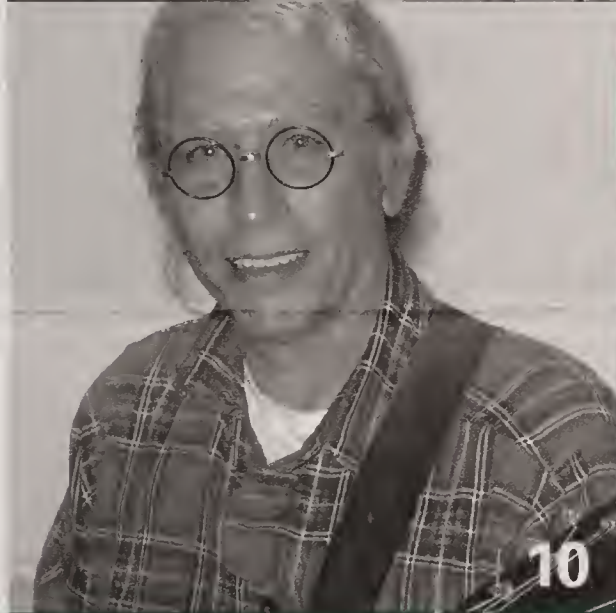
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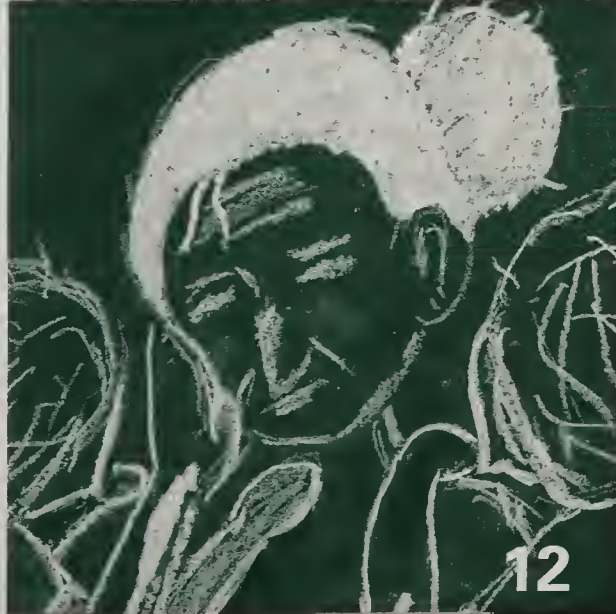


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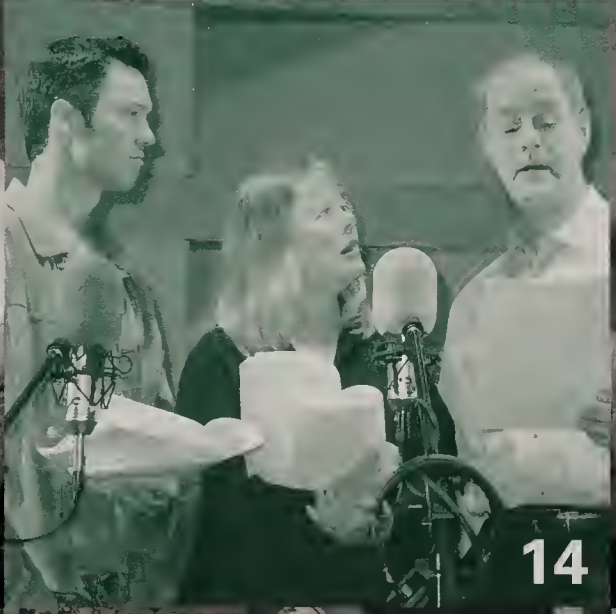
CELEBRATING READING "THE GRAPES OF"



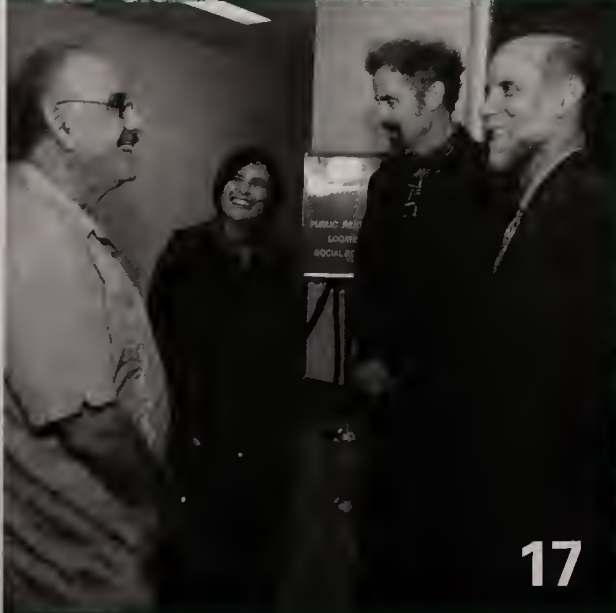
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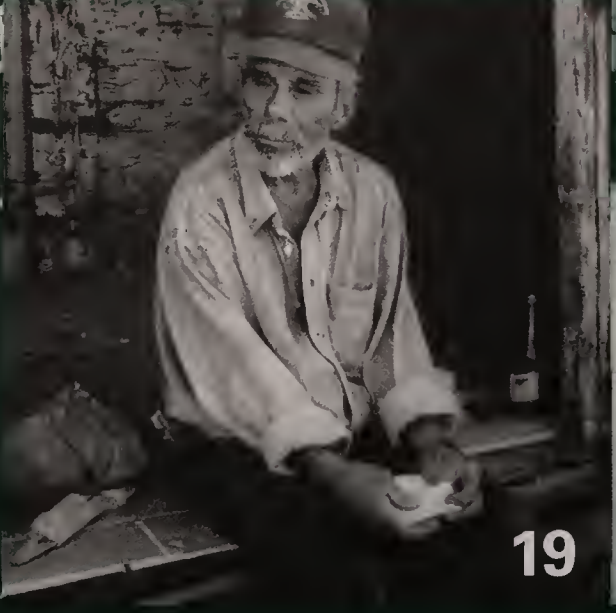
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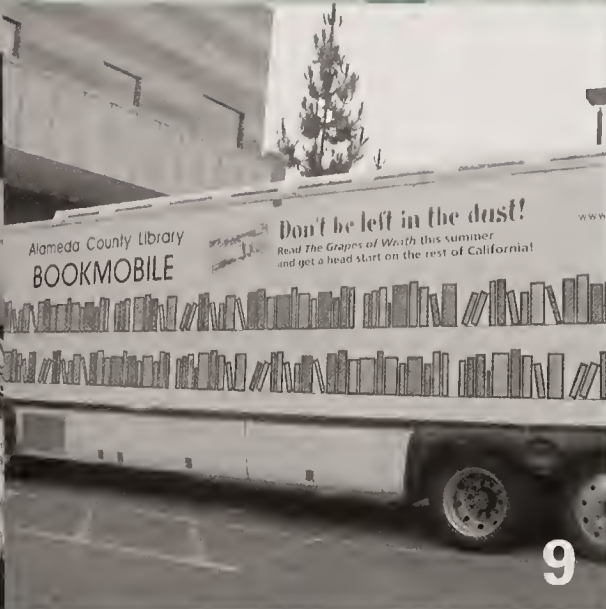
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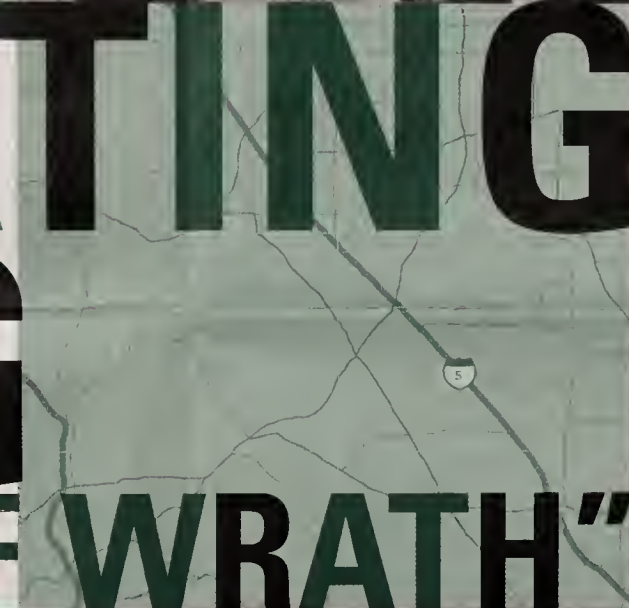
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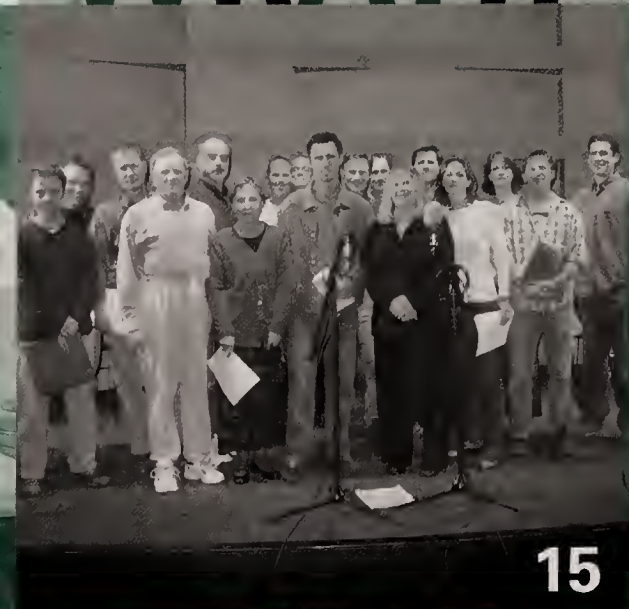
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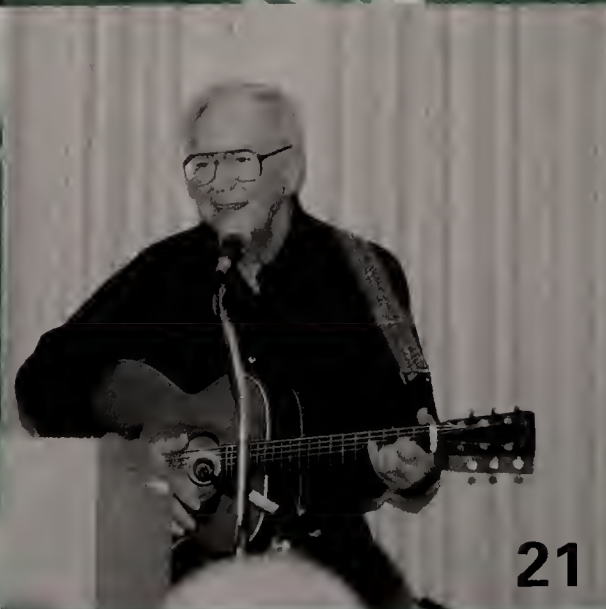
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1. A drawing by Taylor Battle, a student at Los Peñasquitos Elementary School, inspired by a photograph of Dorothea Lange. Part of a display of children's artwork at the Rancho Peñasquitos Branch of the San Diego Public Library for Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*.
2. Award-winning author and Sacramento native Richard Rodriguez led off the Sacramento public library *Grapes of Wrath* program with a talk about Steinbeck as a writer who captured the immigrant story. Photo/Izzy Schwartz
3. Devoya Mayo, one of the featured poets at Grapes of Write, an afternoon of poetry readings and writing workshops sponsored by the Fresno County Library at Artes Americas, the major Latino arts center in Fresno. Photo/Tommy Monreal.
4. David Masumoto, a writer, raisin farmer and former CCH board chair, talked about the plains and pleasure of farm work at the Sacramento Public Library. Photo/Izzy Schwartz
5. A young participant in one of the *Grapes of Wrath* events at the Rancho Peñasquitos Branch Library in San Diego holds up the discussion guide CCH developed for the project. Photo/Jack Smith
6. The 24-hour *Grapes of Wrath* readathon at a Krispy Kreme in Fresno attracted a number of Steinbeck fans, including this couple. The event was sponsored by the Fresno County Public Library. Photo/Tommy Monreal
7. Author and translator Liching Yu led a *Grapes of Wrath* discussion in Chinese at the Chinatown branch of the San Francisco Public Library. Photo/Steven Piasecki
8. Two members of the group Word for Word read excerpts from *The Grapes of Wrath* at the San Francisco Public Library. Photo/Steven Piasecki
9. The Alameda County Bookmobile advertised the *Grapes of Wrath* program beginning last summer. Photo courtesy of the Alameda County Library
10. Musician Joel Rafael and his band performed at the Skirball Cultural Center during the staged reading of Frank Galati's *The Grapes of Wrath*, a special presentation in Los Angeles to celebrate Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*. Photo/Bernard Fallon
11. CCH Executive Director Jim Quay (left) talks to director Richard Masur at a reception at the Skirball Cultural Center following a special performance of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Photo/Bernard Fallon
12. A drawing by Jin Su, a student at Los Peñasquitos Elementary School, inspired by a photograph of Dorothea Lange. Part of a display of children's artwork at the Rancho Peñasquitos Branch of the San Diego Public Library for Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*.
13. (left to right) CCH Associate Executive Director Ralph Lewin, musicians Joel Raphael and Jackson Browne, and actor/director Richard Masur at the Skirball Cultural Center following a special performance of *The Grapes of Wrath* benefiting CCH and the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University. Photo/Bernard Fallon
14. (left to right) Jeffrey Donovan, Shirley Knight and Francis Guinan performed in the L.A. Theatre Works production of *The Grapes of Wrath* at the Skirball Cultural Center. The special presentation, with Donovan as Tom Joad, Knight as Ma Joad and Guinan as Casy, benefited CCH and the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University. Photo/Bernard Fallon
15. The cast of the special week-long run of *The Grapes of Wrath* poses on the stage of the Skirball Cultural Center on the day before the event. Photo/Bernard Fallon
16. Studs Terkel signs autographs at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco after appearing in a special evening of conversation with writer Calvin Trillin. The sold-out event was sponsored by CCH and the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University. Photo/Steven Piasecki
17. (left to right) Filmmaker Paul Espinosa, CCH Senior Programs Manager Amy Rouillard, writer T.C. Boyle and CCH Executive Director Jim Quay at a reception for Boyle at the San Diego Public Library. Photo/Jack Smith
18. A drawing by Nicole El-Kaouli, a student at Los Peñasquitos Elementary School, inspired by a photograph of Dorothea Lange. Part of a display of children's artwork at the Rancho Peñasquitos Branch of the San Diego Public Library for Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*.
19. "Paycheck" from the Migrant Project, an exhibit of photographs by Rick Nahmias held at the Frances Howard Goldwyn Library in Hollywood. Photo courtesy Rick Nahmias.
20. Diana Godnez, a student at CSU Fresno, participated in Grapes of Write, an afternoon of poetry readings and writing workshops at Artes Americas, the major Latino arts center in Fresno. Photo/Tommy Monreal.
21. Folksingers Keith McNeil and his wife, Rusty (not pictured), entertained audiences at eight Southern California libraries with labor music of the 1930s. Photo/Jack Smith

California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* is a project of the California Council for the Humanities in partnership with the California Center for the Book. It is supported in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

Californian musician finds Guthrie and Steinbeck still move audiences

Ross Altman was completing work on a doctorate in English literature when he made one of the biggest decisions of his life: to trade in a certain future in academia for the unpredictable life of a folksinger. At the urging of a then-girlfriend, he finished the degree and taught college English for a few years before launching his new career full time. Since then, there's been no looking back.

"I had been singing all along, but what prompted the decision," he says, "was that my level of interest in music had shifted from being a serious pastime to being an all-consuming passion. And I had started to write songs myself."

Altman's passion for music is

One woman whose grandfather was a Dust Bowl refugee went up to him after a performance and gave him a copy of her grandfather's unpublished autobiography. "She told me he had written it so his children and grandchildren would know where they came from."

matched by an equal passion for social justice. "I've written songs dealing with labor issues, the environment, gay rights, a whole range of things" he says. "I try to combine music and social activism, the way folk music did so well in the 1950s and during Woody Guthrie's generation," he says. "But I don't write preachy songs. I try to find a good story to tell."

Altman has been singing Woody Guthrie songs ever since he can remember. Thus it wasn't surprising when CCH invited him to participate in California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* as a folksinger. "I thought I would go to a few libraries and perform Guthrie's 'Dust Bowl Ballads' about the Okie migration," he says.

But Altman ended up doing something much more ambitious—something that allowed him to combine the two strands of his professional life.

As a college professor, Altman had adapted *The Grapes of Wrath*

into a play for his students to perform in staged readings at speech festivals in Illinois. He began and ended the play with Guthrie's "The Ballad of Tom Joad" from the "Dust Bowl Ballads" album.

Altman dug out the 20-page script and a light bulb went off. "I



realized I could create a performance for libraries that combined Steinbeck's words and Guthrie's music." He called his program The Ballad of Tom Joad: Woody Guthrie and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

When libraries began to contact him and he explained what he was doing, they signed him up. Before long, he had 30 bookings, all in October. The hardest part, he said, was memorizing the 20-page script.

In his performances, Altman acted out each scene of the play, opening and closing the scenes with a Guthrie song. He performed in towns and cities all over California—from San Diego to Sunnyvale and from Salinas to Needles.

After each performance, he invariably met people with family stories of coming to California during the Dust Bowl. One woman whose grandfather was a Dust Bowl refugee went up to him after a performance and gave him a copy of her grandfather's unpublished autobiography. "She told me he had written it so his children and grandchildren would know where they came from."

Altman visited towns he had never been to before and met people he would have never met. Everywhere, people responded enthusiastically to his performances, particularly to the music. "When people hear Guthrie's songs, I see a shock of recognition on their faces," he says. "It's as if the songs were being sung for the first time, and I realize what astonishing works of art they are, that they still can move people to tears and make them laugh."

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Q & A with Susan Shillinglaw



Steinbeck authority Susan Shillinglaw, director of the Center for Steinbeck Studies and a professor of English at San Jose State University, was a featured speaker at 15 Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* events. She talked to Humanities Network recently about her experiences.

HN: You had a great turnout at all your programs. What do you think brought people out?

There's a real sense of Steinbeck's being an author people want to read or reread. People also wanted to have a conversation with other people reading the same book to see what their viewpoints were.

HN: What is it about Steinbeck that attracts people?

Steinbeck engages you on an emotional level and makes you care about what happens to his characters. Take the camp scene when Ma Joad is making soup for the family. A crowd of children gather around the fire, staring at the food, and you can almost feel their hunger. He also gives you a sense of the texture of family life. You see Ma Joad teaching Rose of Sharon how to be a "Joad"—"Our people don't do that," she tells her. Also, I think the book speaks to conditions today. California is still wrestling with many problems—migrant workers, housing, people being marginalized. It brings up issues we still need to think about.

HN: What surprised you about your audiences?

They gave me so much contact with history. For example, I met a woman in her 80s who had worked at every one of the government camps in the 1930s. And I met another woman who as a young girl in the 1930s had taken the last wagon from Texas to Colorado. People talked about the texture of their lives, like the kinds of things they had to eat and the kinds of suffering they endured.

HN: What programs impressed you the most?

Many of the events were amazing to me. I loved the public reading in San Francisco. I had brought papers to grade but I was so moved by why people had chosen a specific passage to read that I never did any grading. What people brought to the text made it a new text. Like Ronnie Gilbert saying before she read her passage that to her Ma Joad was the hero of the book. I heard her say that, and I thought, "Yes, that's right. And it wasn't that I hadn't thought that before, but it really struck me this time." And it was wonderful to hear Steinbeck's words read aloud, particularly since reading aloud has become such a lost art.

In Sunnyvale, they had a reading and discussion group in Chinese and 40 people came. And at the Livermore Library, a librarian told me that she had gone to the local farmers' market with a sign she had made that pictured a car, a wagon, a plane and a boat with the heading "How did you come to California?" Many people went up and told her their stories.

HN: What did you take away from the experience?

CCH's idea about the importance of stories made me think about teaching in a whole new way. I'm currently teaching a freshman English seminar course, and I decided to structure it around stories of growing up in California and the idea of place in literature. I had my students research a place that meant something to them and then write about it. I have a kid in my class who is a baseball player, and he is writing a paper about the municipal stadium in San Jose. It's something he cares about.

Fresno Grapes of Write

Local poets, writers and storytellers read, perform and lead workshops

By Juan Felipe Herrera

On Saturday, October 19, some 152 visitors, students and family members visited Artes Americas, the major Latino arts center in Fresno and the Central Valley to witness Grapes of Write, an afternoon of poetry readings and writing workshops sponsored by the Fresno County Public Library as part of California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*. Lydia Kuhn, librarian and coordinator of the project, shaped the unique event.

"There were so many writers and workshops, I was inspired to write my own poetry," said Tanya Pacheco, an 18-year-old student from CSU Fresno. Featured on the program were established poets Connie Hales, Margarita Luna Robles and this writer as well as storytellers Mai and Lee Yang. Emerging writers Mike Medrano, Devoya Mayo and Everardo Pedraza also read their work.

The event wove a zarape of Steinbeck's narrative of immigrant experience, downtrodden family and parched earth with the new talents of local writers and first-time

reading participants. It also was a moment for acknowledging the accomplishments of valley writers such as Mike Medrano, who recently won the CSU Fresno Andrés Montoya Creative Writing Award, and Devoya Mayo, one of Fresno's pioneers in the fusion of hip-hop



spoken word readings for multicultural audiences.

Grapes of Write also opened a door for heartfelt story relationships. When Mai Yang, whose family emigrated from Laos to Fresno, spoke of the hardships her family had endured, one Mexicana

woman said, "She's telling my story, too." The workshops involved Hmong story-cloths, meditation and writing, journaling and active exchanges of ideas, and fresh word experiments. Emmanuel Laurel, another student, said, "This was the first time I tasted writing and my own experience at the same time." He may have been referring to Margarita Luna Robles' workshop, during which participants actually enjoyed grapes, then wrote about their own sensory landscapes and the interconnectedness of their families to the land and environment of the valley.

Connie Hales, co-coordinator of the new M.F.A. creative writing program at CSU Fresno, discussed Steinbeck's work, her own craft and her new book, *Separate Escapes*. One of her poems, "The Coldness of the World," echoed through the room:

*My mother kneels to inspect rose leaves
Low on the bushes that separate
Our lives from the street. She is fearless...*
The people wrote down her words, they thought for a moment,

the world stopped, a photographer for the bilingual Latino periodical *Vida del Valle* snapped the shutter for a feature a week later, and a larger universe hovered over Artes Americas and the Central Valley. Steinbeck, new breath, migrant trials and stories, on cloth, paper, across tables, across hearts and open plates of creative spirit.

CCH Board member Juan Felipe Herrera has written more than a dozen books of poetry, narrative and children's prose. He teaches culture studies, creative writing and teatro in the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies at CSU Fresno.

Californian musician (continued from page 6)

Altman also performs his Steinbeck/Guthrie program for groups of high school students and a modified version for elementary-school children. At the outset, he wasn't sure how kids would respond. "I thought that their musical tastes would be so far removed from mine that it would be hard to make a connection," he said. "Instead, they immediately and intuitively understand Guthrie's sense of alienation, his role as an outsider looking in, his displaced refugee status, and his refusal to give up in the face of enormous adversity. I decided that Guthrie speaks to pimply faced teens as surely as he does to grizzled old folks."

With kids, Altman opens his show with the words Guthrie used to define himself as an artist: "I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose, bound to lose, because you are either too young or too old, or too fat or too slim, or too ugly or too this or too that ... I'm out to fight those kinds of songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood."

Altman has his own unique way

of describing his approach to music, It's a line he freely admits he stole from the writer H.L. Mencken: "I sing to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable," he says. It's a definition that seems to suit him well.

Los Angeles folksinger Ross Altman can be reached at greygoosemusic@aol.com. Buddha Records released "Dust Bowl Ballads" on CD in 2000. It contains Guthrie's original liner notes.

Motheread changes hands

Popular family literacy program to continue under United Way

The United Way of Greater Los Angeles has been named the new affiliate of Motherhead/Fatheread, L.A., the highly regarded family literacy program that CCH brought to the Los Angeles area 10 years ago. The program, which has won numerous awards, including the National Endowment for the Humanities Medal, served more than 3,500 families in Los Angeles last year.

CCH decided to relinquish its affiliate role last October in order to concentrate its resources on its multiyear California Stories initiative. The United Way officially assumed its association with Motherhead on January 1, 2003, and was selected after a lengthy search process involving both CCH and Motherhead's national office.

"We're very pleased to have such a worthy organization assume responsibility for Motherhead," said CCH Executive Director Jim Quay. "We're proud to have been one of the first state humanities councils to become a state affiliate of Motherhead and proud of our stewardship of the program, so it is with

a sense of sadness that we end our ties with such a successful family reading program."

Debra Colman, who has been the CCH coordinator for Motherhead for the past six years, will continue in her position at the United Way.

"Motherhead is just a terrific program," said Colman. "It changes people in so many ways—the way they feel about books, the way they parent their child, the way children look at books, the way they feel about themselves. When families become involved in Motherhead, they walk away feeling empowered."

Motheread works with a network of more than 30 nonprofit groups in Los Angeles. Each group has at least one trained Motherhead person on staff who conducts Motherhead programs in Los Angeles County.

For more information about Motherhead, contact the United Way of Greater Los Angeles at 213/630-2100.

Who We Are

The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to enrich California’s cultural life and to strengthen communities through public use of the humanities.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

To learn more about the Council and how you can participate in its programs, please visit us online at www.californiastories.org.

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